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The Magyar connection or Constantine and Methodius in the steppes

STEPHAN NIKOLOV

This paper is aimed at provoking the imagination of its readers rather than at giving any final settlement to a *topos* explored already in numerous Cyrillo-Methodian studies.¹ The problems discussed here are related to the Byzantine Balkan policy as a background to Constantine's mission to the Khazars. It seems to me that the Moravian mission of SS Cyril and Methodius came as an outgrowth of Constantine's mission to the steppes. Moravia, Bulgaria and the Pontic steppes seem in many respects different parts of the one domain of the Byzantine 'Northern policy'.²

1. Political background or Byzantium in the Balkans on the eve of the mission

The year 860 has a special place in Byzantine history. the empire had consecutive wars against the Arabs in Sicily, in the east Mediterranean

1. Two lectures held before the Byzantine studies seminar at the University of Oxford brought my attention to some peculiarities of the Byzantine mission of 861 to the Khazars: the one of J.D. Howard Johnston, and the second, of Dr. J. Shepard. I am greatly indebted to them for commenting on this paper.

2. The studies on Cyril and Methodius are legion. I am not going to make a comprehensive study on them here for most of the interpretations of the Khazar mission are essentially the same. Cf. F. Dvornik, *Les Légendes de Constantin et le Méthode vues de Byzance* (Prague 1933), and *idem*, *Byzantine Missions among the Slavs. SS Constantine-Cyril and Methodius* (New Brunswick 1970) 49-73; P. Duthilleul, *L'Évangélisation des slaves. Cyrille et Méthode*, (Bibliothèque de théologie 5. Paris 1963) 38-58; A. Vlasto, *The Entry of the Slavs into Christendom* (Cambridge 1970) 33ff. On the Byzantine mission of 861 as counteraction of the further Russian (Varangian) invasions in the Black sea region see: M. Artamonov, *Istoriya Khazar* (History of the Khazars) (Leningrad 1962) 180sq; D. Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars* (Princeton 1954) 236; D. Obolensky, 'Principles of Byzantine Diplomacy', in: *Actes du XII Congrès International des Etudes-Byzantines* I (Belgrade 1963) 45-61 and *idem*, *The Byzantine Commonwealth* (London 1971) 182ff; J. Shepard, 'Byzantine diplomacy, A.D. 800-1204: means and ends', and T. Noonan, 'Byzantium and the Khazars', in: *Byzantine Diplomacy* (J. Shepard and S. Franklin eds.), (London 1992) respectively 41-71, and 91-132.

and in Asia Minor. After the destruction of the fleet under Constantine Condomites in the autumn of 859, the empire had to lose most of its possessions in Sicily. In 860, Arab naval forces attacked the Cyclades. In Asia Minor, Bardas and his brother, Petronas, had campaigned against Ali ibn-Yahya and later with Omar ibn-Abdalah, emir of Melitene.³

Most of the Byzantine military potential was engaged in the struggle with the Arabs. The emperor Michael repeatedly led the army in person. Constantinople was therefore unprotected in June 860, when the fleet of the Rhos appeared in the Bosphorus. The suburbs of the city were defenceless before the barbarians who devastated the shores of the Bosphorus and the Princes' Isles.⁴ Michael III went back to defend the city. It was widely believed, however, that the capital only escaped capture through the intervention of the holy Virgin.⁵ The siege of Constantinople demonstrated that the war with the Arabs limited the Byzantine capacity for active 'northern' and/or 'European' policy.

Active policy in Europe was necessary, however, for in the same year (860), a letter from pope Nicholas I (858-867) arrived in Constantinople.⁶ The pope demanded the return of the Illyrian diocese, detached from the jurisdiction of Rome by Leo III (717-741), in 732.⁷ Nicholas I listed the regions of Illyricum which had been under the jurisdiction of the vicariate of Thessalonica: '*old Epirus and new Epirus, Macedonia, Thessaly, Achaia, Dacia, Dacia Mediterranea,*

3. A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*. 1. *La dynastie d'Amorium (820-867)* (Corpus Bruxellense Hist. Byz.), (Brussels 1935) 315-356.

4. D. Obolensky, *Byzantine Commonwealth*, 182-183.

5. Photius, Patr. of Constantinople, *De Rossorum Incursione, Homilia I, Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* (C. Müller ed.) 5 (Paris 1870) 162-167, and *Homilia 2*, 169-171. Cf. C. Mango, *The Homilies of Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople* (Cambridge, Mass. 1958) 82-95, and 102-103.

6. Nicholas I to Emperor Michael (860), *MGH Epistolae (= MGH Epp.)*, (E. Perels ed.) 6 436-440. See commentary in Fr. Dvornik, *The Photian Schism, History and Legend* (London, Cambridge 1948) 105-109.

7. I accept the time suggested by M. Anastos, 'The Transfer of Illyricum, Calabria, and Sicily to the Jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople', *Silloge Bizantina in onore di Silvio Guisepe Mercati* (Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici, 9 (Rome 1957) 14-31. Recent discussion about the time of the change see J. Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* (Princeton 1987) 307-380 and bibliography; see also 'ILLYRICUM', in: *the Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (A. Kazhdan ed.) 2 (New York-Oxford 1991) 987.

Moesia, Dardania'.⁸ In the first half of the ninth century, the papacy had considerable success in establishing its influence over the western part of Illyricum through Frankish and Roman missionary activities among the Croats.⁹ Missionaries came not only from the Carolingian empire, but also, through Istria, from the patriarchate of Aquileia (Cividale). The dukes Borna (+821), Mislav, Trpimir (845-864) and Domagoj (864-877), were Christians and Frankish vassals.¹⁰

In Byzantine eyes, the papal approach to Illyricum, if successful, would further favour Frankish advance in the region. Undoubtedly, Constantinople was convinced that the papacy was a Frankish ally.¹¹ After 846 the Franks advanced in Pannonia, trying to establish their firm control over Caranthonia and Moravia.¹² For the years between 855 and 861, the Franks had three consecutive campaigns in Moravia: 855,

8. Nicholas I to Emperor Michael (860), *MGH Epp*, 7, 436-440. On the papal approach to the Balkans in the 860s see S. Nikolov, 'Latin Bishops and Balkan Bishopsrics (860-882)', *Yearbook of the Medieval Studies at the CEU, 1994-1995* (Budapest 1996) 200-217.

9. F. Racki, *Documenta historiae Croatiae periodum antiquam illustrantia* (Zagreb 1877) 6-7; N. Klačić, *Povijest Hrvata u Srednjem vijeku* (History of the Croats in the middle Ages) (Zagreb 1990) 44-46; Fr. Sanjek, *Povijest Crkve u Hrvata* (History of Croatian Church) (Zagreb 1992 – second ed.) 48-52. A recent useful article is L. Maksimović, 'The Christianization of the Serbs and the Croats', in: *The Legacy of Saints Cyril and Methodius to Kiev and Moscow* (A.-E. Tachiaos ed.) (Proceedings of the International Congress on the Millennium of the Conversion of Rus' to Christianity. Thessaloniki 26-28.11.1988, Thessaloniki 1992) 167-184.

10. D. Gruber, *Povijest Istre* (History of Istria) (Zagreb 1924) 97; N. Budak, *Prva stoljeca Hrvatske* (The first Ages of Croatia) (Zagreb 1994) 92-99 and I. Goldstein, *Hrvatski Rani Srednji Vijek* (Croatian Early Middle Ages) (Zagreb 1995) 256-268.

11. *Le Liber Pontificalis, Texte, introduction et commentaire* (L. Duchesne ed.), 2 vols. (Paris 1886-1892, reissued by C. Vogel 1955-56 with a third volume updating the commentary) (henceforth *LP*) 2, *Vita Hadriani II*, no. 637, 184, the representatives of the Eastern churches considered the Roman clergy, '*Grecorum imperium detrectantes Francorum foederis inheretis* . . .'. English translation of the *LP*, the *Lives of the Ninth-Century Popes (Liber Pontificalis): The Ancient Biographies of ten Popes from A.D. 817-891* (R. Davis transl.) (Liverpool 1995).

12. A. Vlasto, *The Entry* 24-26 and ff; and Chr. Hannick, 'Die byzantinischen Missionen', *Die Kirche des frühen Mittelalters* (K. Schäferdieck ed.), *Kirchengeschichte als Missionsgeschichte*, 2.1 (München 1978) 279ff., esp. 289-292; H. Wolfram, *Die Geburt Mitteleuropas. Geschichte Österreichs vor seiner Entstehung* (Wien-Berlin 1987) 293sq.

858 and 860-861.¹³ On 20 November 860, Louis the German (842-876) issued a charter confirming the privileges of the Archbishop of Salzburg in Pannonia and Carantania.¹⁴

Byzantium had, in this connection, reason to fear for its positions in the Balkans. About the same time a relationship was established by the East Frankish realm with the Bulgars. After the treaty of Padeborn (845) and by the time Boris of Bulgaria became khan (852) Bulgarian foreign policy seemed firmly set on a pro-Frankish course.¹⁵ Boris waged two military campaigns in the 850s in the Balkan west: one against the Serbs and another, against the Croats.¹⁶ The wars, though unsuccessful, indicated the Bulgars' intention to establish their influence over the west Balkan Slavs. In the late 850s or in the early 860s, Louis the German (843-876) negotiated a treaty with Boris whereby Bulgaria could attack Moravia from the east while he would move against Rastislav, the ruler of Moravia, from the west. At the same time there were rumours within Latin Europe that Boris would accept Christianity from his Frankish ally.¹⁷ By 861-862 the Bulgaro-Frankish alliance was undoubtedly effective, because in 862 a Moravian embassy was already in Constantinople, asking for Byzantine support.¹⁸ The government in Constantinople certainly regarded the advance of Louis the German in

13. *The Annals of Fulda* (T. Reuter, transl.) (Manchester Medieval Sources. Manchester 1992) 48. Cf. Ch. Bowlus, *Franks, Moravians, and Magyars. The Struggle for the Middle Danube, 788-907* (Philadelphia 1995) 115-120.

14. A.L. Kuhar, *The Conversion of the Slovenes* (New York 1959) 73-75; H. Dopsch, 'Slawenmission und päpstliche Politik — Zu den Hintergründen des Methodius-Konfliktes', in: *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Salzburger Landeskunde*, Bd. 126 (1986) 303-340, esp. 314-315.

15. D. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth* 83-84.

16. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio* (=DAI) (G. Moravcsik and R. Jenkins eds. and transl.) (Washington, D.C. 1967²) chap. 31, 151 and chap. 32, 155.

17. The letter of Nicholas I to Solomon of Konstanz (864), *MGH Epp.* (E. Perels ed.) 6, 293, and the evidence of Hincmar, *Annals of St. Bertin* (=AB) (J. Nelson transl.), Manchester Medieval Sources series, Ninth-Century Histories 1 (Manchester 1991), (henceforth AB), 864 118, give as the *terminus ante quem* the promise of Boris to accept Christianity from the Franks. Cf. V. Gjuzelev, *Knyaz Boris I* (Sofia 1969) 74-80. It is clear, however, that this promise had been given some years earlier, perhaps in 860 when the secret alliance between Carloman and Rastislav became more or less evident. Cf. Ch. Bowlus, *Franks, Moravians, and Magyars* 119-120 ff.

18. *Vita Constantini* (The Life of Constantine) and *Vita Methodii* (The Life of Methodius), in *Medieval Slavic Lives of Saints and Princes* (M. Kantor ed.), Michigan Slavic Translations 5 (Ann Arbor 1983), respectively chap. 14, 65-67 and chap. 5, 111.

Pannonia and Caranthania, as a revival of Charlemagne's south-eastern policy. The possible close proximity of the Franks to the Byzantine possessions in the western Balkans was not exactly to be welcomed by Constantinople.

Constantinople had been presumably concerned with the affairs in Pannonia even before the arrival of Rastislav's embassy in 862. According to the *Vita Methodii*, Rastislav's representatives had told the emperor: '*many Christian preachers have come to us [the Moravians] from among the Italians, Greeks and Germans, teaching us in various ways*'.¹⁹ Though this does not mean that these preachers had been necessarily imperial emissaries, Constantinople should have been informed about the situation in Pannonia and Caranthania.²⁰ A prospective Bulgaro-German coalition was undoubtedly not favoured by the Byzantines. They must have well remembered the beginning of the ninth century, when Charlemagne was challenging the Roman imperial title of the *basileus*, and Krum was threatening Constantinople itself. For the Byzantines, a Frankish-Bulgarian alliance combined with the papal claim for Illyricum would destroy any chance of political, cultural and spiritual influence in the Balkans.

This was the reality as seen from Constantinople in 860-861, when an intelligent man, lionised by the patriarch and the emperor, was sent to the Khazars to convert them from Judaism to Christianity. His name was Constantine, and he was joined by his brother Methodius, a monk from a monastery on Mount Olympos, who was formerly *archon* of a Slavic province of the Empire.²¹

2. The Mission of 861 and the *Vita Constantini*

The only evidence for the mission is in the Cyrillo-Methodian hagiographic tradition, and the *Vita Constantini* is the only source which describes it in detail.²² The *Vita* was composed between 874 and 880,

19. *Vita Methodii*, chap. 5, 111.

20. A. Vlasto, *The Entry*, 27.

21. Cf. I. Ševčenko, 'On the Social Background of Cyril and Methodius', *Studia paleoslovenica* (Prague 1971) 431-351. the province is most probably *Opsikion*, according to A.-E. Tachiaos, 'Some controversial points relating to the life and activity of Cyril and Methodius', *Cyrrilomethodianum. Recherches sur l'histoire des relations Helléno-slaves*, XVII-XVIII (Thessalonique 1993/4), 41-72, at 46-61.

22. *Vita Constantini*, chaps. 8-12, 41-65.

under the inspiration of Methodius, by some of his disciples, possibly Clement, before Methodius travelled from Moravia to Constantinople.²³ The *Vita* aimed chiefly at defending the Slavic alphabet and liturgy just introduced in Moravia, by proving Constantine-Cyril to be a holy man and saint. Such an image of Constantine was particularly needed for Methodius and his disciples in their struggle over the Slavic liturgy with the Bavarian clergy. Once Constantine's sanctity was proved, his work would be more easily accepted. In that sense, the *Vita Constantini*, like many other hagiographic works, appears to be merely a product of propaganda and it could be easily compared with its contemporary parallels, such as *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum*.²⁴

We are told by the *Vita Constantini* that Constantine, together with his brother Methodius and 'many others', was sent to Khazaria as the emperor's representative after an invitation from the kagan for a disputation on religious issues at the Khazars' court.²⁵ However, it is hard to believe that the letter of the kagan, if it existed at all, appears in its original version in *Vita Constantini*. It is most unlikely that the kagan would admit to having 'shameful customs'.²⁶ It is unusual that the official Byzantine imperial ambassadors, requested by the kagan, were not accompanied by Khazar representatives.

It is generally accepted that the Byzantine embassy was motivated by both political and missionary considerations. The embassy was most probably aimed at preventing another Russian threat like the one Constantinople had faced a year before.²⁷ This is not, however, the point of this paper. The mission was a manifestation of a political action, for the emperor told the Philosopher: 'But bear in mind the imperial power and honour, and go honourably and with imperial help'.²⁸ However, an inclusion of political tasks was deemed unsuitable in a saint's life and

23. A. Vlasto, *The Entry*, 30; Fr. Dvornik, *Byzantine Missions*, 182.

24. See H. Wolfram, *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum* (Wien-Köln-Graz 1979) 69; F. Dvornik, *Byzantine Missions*, 50ff; A. Vlasto, *the Entry*, 33ff.

25. *Vita Constantini*, chap. 8, 41-43.

26. *Vita Constantini*, chap. 8, 41 and note 30.

27. Fr. Dvornik, *Byzantine Missions*, 70-73; D. Obolensky, *the Byzantine Commonwealth*, 177.

28. *Vita Constantini*, chap. 8, 43.

we have to (re)construct Constantine's activities as an imperial emissary from the restricted evidence of our source.²⁹

The most important detail of the story is that Constantine stayed in the Crimea for six months, in order, according to the *Vita*, to learn some Hebrew.³⁰ His stay, however, was combined with much travelling in the surroundings of Cherson. Besides his linguistic exercise the philosopher found the relics of St. Clement, then he visited or was visited by some local nomadic tribal leaders, and, finally went further, to the Khazars.

The discovery of St. Clement's relics is important for it is the semantic connection between the Khazar mission and the next mission to Moravia. According to the *Vita*, 'when he [Constantine] heard that St. Clement was still lying in the sea, he prayed and said: *I believe in God and place my hope in St. Clement, that I shall find him and take him from the sea*'.³¹ The relics were later brought to Constantinople and then moved to Moravia with the next mission of Constantine and Methodius in 863.³² Most probably, the transfer of St. Clement's relics aimed to supply the future Moravian church with the much needed religious remains. The relics of St. Clement were finally transferred to Rome in 868. Surprisingly, there is no evidence these relics were donated to any church in Constantinople after the Thessalonian brothers' return to the imperial court. The purpose of the relics was, therefore, to be sent to Moravia. The story of this six-years travel of St. Clement's remains is very interesting and can probably give answers to many questions related to the Cyrillo-Methodian missions. However, in this paper mention of this is made only to point out the spiritual relation between east Central Europe and the steppes.

According to the *Vita* and not surprisingly for the Byzantine hagiographic tradition, Constantine and his fellows had to act under extraordinarily hostile circumstances in the steppes. Thus for example, the future Slavic apostle was faced with a Khazar local commander, who attacked a Greek town in the Crimea, but who, after meeting with

29. P. Duthilleul, *L'Évangélisation des slaves*, 38; F. Dvornik, *Byzantine Missions*, 65ff; D. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, 177.

30. *Vita Constantini*, chap. 9, 45.

31. *Vita Constantini*, chap. 8, 43.

32. P. Duthilleul, *L'Évangélisation des slaves*, 44-51.

the philosopher, promised to accept Christianity and marched out from there.³³ As F. Dvornik has noticed, 'this story may not have been invented, however, it was probably not Constantine alone who intervened, but the imperial official, representing the emperor, who led the embassy'.³⁴

Further, Constantine faced some Magyars,³⁵ who 'fell upon him howling like wolves and wishing to kill him'.³⁶ But, 'upon hearing his edifying words from his lips, they released him and his people in peace'.³⁷ The description of this meeting is typical of the hagiographic tradition. The story of a holy man's miraculous escape through God's help from Barbarians whom he had tamed with his words is a *locus communis* frequently met in Procopius, and Sozomenos had already established the tradition, describing such cases.³⁸ The Magyars were allies or subjects of the Khazar kagan and this situation did not change till the 860s.³⁹ The sources until 861 barely contain any reference that can, without any doubt, be related to the Magyars in the west Pontic steppes. In Bury's opinion the Magyars settled there in 822-826.⁴⁰ In Macartney's view, the Hungarians had moved west of the Don between 825 and 830.⁴¹ A. Toynbee believed that Magyars were settled there by the Khazars, in 829.⁴² In any case Magyars must have appeared in the western steppes as early as the 830s for they acted as Bulgarian allies between 836 and 837.⁴³ The Magyars had been at large as a distinct grouping over a generation before the beginning of the 860s. The *De*

33. *Vita Constantini*, chap. 9, 45. the short version of the *Vita* mentions an attempt at Constantine's assassination by the Jews and the Khazars.

34. F. Dvornik, *Byzantine Missions*, 67.

35. A recent useful study in English is G. Cristo, *Hungarian History in the Ninth Century* (Szeged 1996).

36. *Vita Constantini*, chap.9, 45.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Cf. G. Moravcsik, 'Byzantine Christianity and the Magyars in the period of their migration', *The American Slavic and East European Review* 5 (1946) 29-45, at 44-45.

39. *DAI*, chap. 38, 173. Cf. J. Shepard and S. Franklin, *Emergency of Rus*, 84.

40. J.b. Bury, *A History of the Eastern Roman Empire from the Fall of Irene to the Accession of Basil (A.D. 802-867)* (London 1912) 491.

41. C. Macartney, *Magyars in the Ninth Century* (Cambridge² 1968) 108.

42. A. Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and His World* (London-New York-Toronto 1973) 444-445.

43. Cf. G. Cristo, *Hungarian History*, 86-87 with detailed discussion.

Administrando Imperio, a mid-tenth century Byzantine source, contains stories of the early Magyars' relations with the Khazars, who probably had relations with the Byzantines about the time of the *DAI*'s compilation. Probably just before the mid-ninth century Magyars moved westwards and moved the 'Κάβαροι', a population that had formerly been under Khazar authority.⁴⁴ It seems quite safe to conclude that between the late 830s and 860/861 the Magyars were under Khazar rule or at least members of the Khazar confederation.⁴⁵ Does this mean that Constantine's mission was aimed at securing the Byzantine possessions to the north of the Black Sea? The answer is most likely yes, though we do not have any other evidence besides the *Vita Constantini*.

There are, however, several connections between the Byzantine mission of 860/861 and what was to happen later in Central Europe. The *Vita Methodii* proves such a 'Magyar connection'. After, or, most probably, on his way from Constantinople to Moravia in 881, it was Methodius to meet again with the Magyars: 'When the King of Hungary came to the lands of the Danube, Methodius wished to see him. And though some were assuming and saying: *He will not escape torment*, Methodius went to him . . . Having conversed with him as befits such men to converse, he dismissed him with an embrace and many gifts. Kissing him, he said: *O venerable Father, remember me always in your holy prayers*'.⁴⁶ It is scarcely surprising that the possible political target of the meeting is completely missing in the *Vita*.

The dispute with the Jews in Khazaria is another interesting *topos*, because it is also related to later Moravian events. Constantine might

44. *DAI*, chaps. 38-39, 172-173. Cf. G. Cristo, *Hungarian History*, 97-102. Cf. J. Shepard and S. Franklin, *Emergence of Rus*, 84.

45. J. B. Bury, *History of the Eastern Roman Empire*, 491.

46. *Vita Methodii*, chap. 16, 125. the commentary of M. Kantor (cf. his note 76) follows Fr. Dvornik, *Byzantine missions* 184, stating that Methodius had met emperor Charles III, the Fat (881-887). The 'Hungarian connection' has been confirmed by G. Moravcsik, 'Byzantine Christianity and the Magyars', 44-45, and *idem*, *Byzantium and the Magyars* (Amsterdam 1970), 30; According to P. Király, *Magyarok émlítése a Konstantin- és Metód- legendában* (Mentions of Hungarians in the legends of Constantine and Methodius) (Budapest 1974), 55-68, the meeting took place in 882; see also I. Toth, *Konstantin-Cirill és Metód élete és működése* (Lives and activities of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius) (Budapest 1981), 170-178 who even suggested that Methodius had met Arpad himself. I am deeply grateful to my friends from the CEU-Budapest for helping me in consulting the Hungarian texts.

have met some Jews in the Steppes and probably had some disputes with them. The *Vita Constantini*, however, gives a somewhat anachronistic picture of the political situation in Khazaria in the early 860s. Our source shows that all the decisions on Khazar affairs had been reached by the kagan. For Constantine was dealing with the kagan only, according to the Life. Some students of the subject, therefore, tend to believe that the Khazar affair is a later interpolation in the *Vita Constantini*.⁴⁷ Even if this observation does not prove entirely correct, it is inconceivable that the embassy had dealt solely, or exclusively, with matters of orthodoxy and conversion, as the *Vita* implies. This mission seems a little strange for a purely Christian assignment. The 'missionaries' converted about 200 persons and obtained the release of the same number of Byzantine captives. However, none of the Byzantine representatives stayed to further the limited success of the conversion. This is a clear indication that the religious issue was of a lesser importance and that the assignment was political rather than ecclesiastical.

On the other hand, Methodius, who had probably sponsored the composition of the *Vita Constantini*, was forced by circumstances to describe in detail Constantine's brilliant defence of Christianity in his dispute with the Jews. This is not only because Methodius was a witness and participant in the mission in the steppes. According to the *Short Life of Methodius*, a dispute occurred about 879-880, in which dispute Methodius overcame some heretics and Jews, among them one Khazar, a certain Zambrios.⁴⁸ The description of Constantine's dispute with the Jews in Khazaria, as it appears in the *Vita Constantini*, was aimed at attacking Methodius' Jewish opponents in Moravia.

47. O. Pritsak, 'Turkological remarks on Constantine's Khazarian mission in the *Vita Constantini*', in: E. Farrugia et al., eds. *Christianity among the Slavs. The heritage of Saints Cyril and Methodius*, Proceedings of the International Congress held on the Eleventh Centenary of the Death of St. Methodius, Rome, October 8-11 1985 (= *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 231) (Rome 1988) 295-298.

48. 'Prolozhno'e zhiti'e Methodija', *Magnae Moraviae Fontes Historici* 2 (F. Grivec ed.) (Brno 1967) 244. The time of Methodius' dispute should be in 879-880 for Zdeslav seized power in Croatia for about one year (878-879). Cf. F. Šišić, *Povijest Hrvata u vrijeme narodnih vladara* (Croatian History in the Time of the National Rulers) (Zagreb 1925) 385-387, and the notes on 386.

3. The Results of the Mission

In 862, i.e. one year after Constantine's mission in the steppes, Hincmar of Rheims recorded in his section of the *Annals of St. Bertin*, that '*enemies, previously unknown, called Hungarians [Ungri] devastated his [of Louis the German] realm*'.⁴⁹ This invasion most probably was followed by another in 863, reported by the *Annals of St. Galen*.⁵⁰ C. Macartney believed that the Magyars raided Pannonia, incited by the princes of Moravia to help against the Franks, and that the raids recorded for two consecutive years in the two different sources refer to just one invasion, namely, that of 862.⁵¹ Similar assumptions can be found in recent surveys on Hungarian history in the ninth century.⁵²

Whether there were one or two, the Magyars' raid(s) undoubtedly started from Etel-Köz, in the steppes, followed the Danube river, and affected the east Frankish realm. May we speculate that the Magyar raid(s) were provoked by Constantine? They presumably passed along the whole northern Bulgarian border from which we may conclude that the main Bulgar military forces were located to the north. The great river and the Bulgars' army must have protected their lands from the invaders.⁵³ At the same time, Rastislav, for his part, dispatched an embassy to Constantinople requesting Byzantine support against the Frankish-Bulgarian alliance and asking teachers to spread the Christian truth to his Slav subjects in their mother tongue rather than in Latin.⁵⁴ Constantine, who had just returned from the steppes, was now sent to

49. *AB* (J. Nelson transl.), 102.

50. *Annales Sangallenses maiores*: ad ann. 863.

51. C. Macartney, *Magyars in the Ninth Century*, 71 and note 7.

52. G. Cristo, *Hungarian History*, 132-33 with relevant references to Hungarian scholarly works.

53. The descriptions of the Magyar raid in Bulgaria some 30 years later, namely that of Leo the Wise's *Taktika* (chap. 18, § 42), of Constantine VII's *DAI* (chap. 51, 251-253), and of the continuation of George the Monk (ed. Bonn, 853-855), point out that the Magyars could force the Danube only with Byzantine naval support.

54. V. Zlatarski, *Istoria na bulgarskata durzhava prez srednite vekove* (History of the Bulgarian State in the Middle ages), vol. I/ part 2 (Sofia 1927) 62ff; Fr. Dvornik *Byzantine Missions*: 78-80; G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, 229; D. Treštík, 'Velikaya Moravia i zarozhdenie cheshkogo gosudarstva' (Great Moravia and the formation of the Czech state)', in *Ranefeodal'nye gosudarstva i narodnosti* (Moskva 1991) 88-90; F. Šišić, *Povijest Hrvata u doba narodnih vladara*, 80; V. Gjuzelev, *Knyaz Boris I*, 220-317; N. Klaić, *Provijest Hrvata u Ranom srjednom vijeku*, 349sq.

Moravia, again with Methodius. The brothers departed for Central Europe carrying the holy relics of St. Clement, found in the Crimea. The two missions were certainly closely related, or, at least, the emperor considered the Khazar and the Moravian cases as two parts of one story, and they were therefore entrusted to the same people.

I share the emperor's opinion that the Khazar and the Moravian missions were really two parts of the Balkan, or the Illyrian story. Apart from the relics of St. Clement, which indicated the spiritual link, Methodius provided a much more down-to-earth and vivid connection between the mission to the steppes and that to Moravia.⁵⁵ In the steppes, Constantine and Methodius had many other assignments than simply that of a religious dispute at the Khazar court. Constantine, the leader of the delegation, had to prevent any future northern surprise, such as the Russian one of 860. Further, the imperial representative tried to secure the Byzantine possessions in Crimea, making arrangements with the local Khazar and Magyar hordes.

In 863, the Byzantine war in the east was brought to a conclusion after the imperial general Petronas had annihilated the troops of Omar, emir of Melitene. After a triumph held in Constantinople, Michael III gathered his army on the Bulgarian border and moved his fleet along the southern Bulgarian coast. The invasion was carried out without delay and that was enough for Bulgaria to capitulate.⁵⁶ The Bulgarian army was situated in the north: all along the Danube river, because of the Magyar raids, and along the border with Moravia, as required by the treaty with Louis the German. Boris had to renounce the pact with Louis the German, and to receive baptism from the Byzantine Church. The khan accepted the emperor as his spiritual father.

In the early 880s, essentially the same combination (like that of the early 860s) occurred. Within a period of two years (late 880-early 883), the Franks struggled against Svatopluk (Zwentibald) of Moravia and this had coincided with, or rather provoked, another Moravian embassy to Constantinople, led by the archbishop of Moravia, Methodius.⁵⁷ What followed was a second encounter of Methodius with the Magyars when,

55. *Vita Methodii*, chap. 4, 109-111.

56. See *supra* note 54.

57. *Vita Methodii*, chap. 13, 123.

at the same time, a Hungarian raid was carried out in Central Europe.⁵⁸ Most of the students of this topic agree that the Hungarian incursion in the region had backed Svatopluk's (Zwentibald's) struggle against the eastern Frankish realm,⁵⁹ and that Hungarians had been 'fighting against the Eastern Franks in what is today Eastern Austria presumably not of their own initiative but by invitation of Svatopluk'.⁶⁰

Methodius was militarily, diplomatically and politically an able man. In the 880s, the archbishop of Moravia might have suggested to his ruler, Svatopluk (Zwentibald), to continue the policy of Rastislav, that once had proved being successful. Although it is well known that Svatopluk (Zwentibald) himself favoured the Latin liturgy as performed by the Franks, he was trying to expand his power into lands controlled by Slavic or Slavic-speaking people not particularly inclined to Christianity in its Frankish mode. The *Vita Methodii* implies a direct connection between Methodius' return from Rome and then from Constantinople, and the military achievements of Svatopluk (Zwentibald).⁶¹ The recurrence of events happening in similar circumstances may lead to a reappraisal of the Byzantine approach to the steppe nomads, northern Balkans and Central Europe in the period between the 860s and 890s. In the 880s, however, Methodius, being once experienced in Hungarian matters, presumably acted in accord with Svatopluk as Moravian archbishop, and, by all means, with the consent of the Byzantine government.⁶²

It is highly probable, therefore, that the Thessalonian brothers were entrusted with finding a reliable Byzantine ally in the steppes, who could help the empire to counteract the Bulgaro-Frankish coalition, in

58. *Continuatio Annalium Iuvanensium maximorum*, MGH SS, XXX/2, 742: '(. . .) the first war (was) with the Hungarians (. . .) the second war with the Qabars (*cum Cowaris*)'.

59. P. Király, *ibid*; cf. I. Toth, *Konstantin-Círrill és Metód* 170-178.

60. Gy. Cristo, *Hungarian History*, 175. Cf. Ch. Bowlus, *Franks, Moravians, and Magyars*, 237-238.

61. *Vita Methodii*, chap. 10, 119. Such a connection has been also seen by Ch. Bowlus, *Franks, Moravians, and Magyars*, 194-196.

62. This became possible after papal vindication of Methodius in Moravia and the reconciliation between Rome and Byzantium at the council of Constantinople of 879/880. The letter of John VIII to Svatopluk, '*Industriae tuae notum esse volumus*' (880), MGH Epp. (E. Caspar ed.) 7, Ep. 255, 222-224, suggests, however, that in spite of the fact that ruler and archbishop got in bad terms, their relations should have improved after Methodius' return from Rome.

the early 860s. The Magyars became such an ally and they would prove their value from 862 on. In this connection, the mission of Constantine and Methodius to the steppes had contributed to the 'Byzantine revival' in the Balkans in the later ninth century. Further, it seems probable that Methodius, being already an Apostle of the Slavs, might have used this diplomatic and political experience in favour of Moravia. It goes without saying that the diplomacy of Methodius could not have clashed with the interests of the Byzantine emperor but rather might have been carried out in agreement with Constantinople.

Can we safely conclude that the Byzantine mission to the Steppes had a political target that affected much broader territory than simply the north Black Sea region? In 860, the Byzantine government, however, could have hardly foreseen the events to occur in Central Europe in the 880s. At the same time, either Michael III or his learned patriarch, Photios, hardly believed that in the next centuries most of Eastern Europe would use the Slavic alphabet and liturgy that had been created by high-ranking Byzantine emissaries. Unfortunately, there are no other sources to prove this construction of events and evidence. Let me therefore conclude with the point raised at the beginning of this paper: that this text is aimed at asking questions rather than offering answers.

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